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10 *local government and politics:*

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THE MUNICIPIO OF TEPOZTLÁN is one of twenty-seven municipios of the state of Morelos. It is governed by the State Constitution of November 20, 1930, which abolished the older political divisions known as districts and established "free municipios," each with local governments to be elected by popular vote. The village of Tepoztlán is the seat of the municipal government and as such is the most important administrative and political center of the municipio.

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Tepoztlán, like Mexico as a whole, has had a long and complicated political history which antedates the Spanish Conquest by many centuries. As has been noted before, Tepoztlán had experienced a number of conquests before the coming of the Spaniards and had a long history of living under political domination and an authoritarian system. The more than three hundred years of Spanish rule during the colonial period continued this tradition. In fact, Mexican independence from Spain brought very little political change for the village, and it continued to live under an authoritarian and imposed regime up to the Revolution of 1910–20.

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Since 1910 political life in the village has been unusually intense, dramatic, and not without its tragic aspects. Because of its proximity to both the state and national capitals it has been particularly subject to outside political influences and has reflected state and national political trends. Almost every political current of national importance has had some repercussions in the village. The village participated in the struggle against the Huerta Uprising, and later against the Cristeros.

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In the thirties the village had a Communist cell and was strongly pro-Cárdenas. Later it was in favor of Almazán and there was even talk of armed uprising when he was defeated. The Sinarquistas were also active in the village, though quite unsuccessful. And during World War II the villagers were decidedly pro-axis and anti-gringo. More recently the campaign against hoof and mouth disease again fanned anti-American sentiment, because of the widespread belief that American pressure was responsible for the killing of diseased animals. In all of this, Tepoztlán reflected national tendencies.

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Local government in Tepoztlán shows many of the characteristics and problems familiar to students of Latin America, and of Mexico in particular, and presents

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a sorry picture. Inefficiency, irresponsibility of officials, dishonesty and graft, lack of local funds for public improvements, betrayal by leaders, widespread suspicion of the government and its motives, lack of village unity, and apathy are among the salient traits.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The local government is known as the *ayuntamiento* and consists of the following officers: president, *síndico procurador, regidor de hacienda,* secretary of the *ayuntamiento,* treasurer, police chief, sub-police chief, *juez menor,* secretary to the *juez menor,* and porter. In addition there are eight *ayudantes,* each representing one of the *demarcaciones* of the village. The president, *síndico, regidor,* and *juez menor* are elected by popular vote for a two-year period.[1] The other officials are appointed by the president in agreement with the *síndico* and *regidor.*

The duties of the major officials are determined by state law. The way in which the officials function depends upon their personalities. A meek president will serve only as a figurehead and allow the *síndico* and secretary to run the government. An aggressive president may in turn take over the functions of the other officials. The president is the executive officer and as such is the official representative of the village in dealings with the outside. His signature is necessary for most correspondence and official acts. He sets the fines for infractions of the law; in addition, the inhabitants often bring their private difficulties and family quarrels to him.

The *síndico* is charged with responsibility for protecting the communal resources of the municipio, that is, the lands, forests, and water resources. It is he who guards the titles to these resources. He has authority to use the local police to apprehend anyone suspected of immoderate or illegal use of communal resources. The *síndico,* together with the president, inspects the accounts of the municipio. In addition, he is responsible for the inspection of cattle before they are slaughtered to determine that they are not diseased. He must inspect the cattle brands to be sure that the cattle have not been stolen. Furthermore, he is the sub-agent of the Ministerio Público, and in this capacity acts as an attorney general, responsible for investigating all violations of the laws of the state.

The *regidor* is responsible for the financial operations of the municipio, and the treasurer serves as his assistant.

By far the greatest number of tasks falls to the secretary of the *ayuntamiento.* He is generally the most literate of the officials, and the present officeholder is a competent typist. He opens and closes the government offices six days a week, signs all correspondence, attends all public functions, maintains the records of the municipio, advises the other officers of the state law, keeps the president informed of all complaints, and attends to all complaints and requests for certifications.

The chief of police is directly responsible to the president and the entire *ayun-*

[1] There have also been other changes in the number of government employees. The present government organization follows the requirements of the State Constitution of 1930. From 1910–30 the state of Morelos was under military rule.

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Year	*Income (Pesos)*
1934	4,011.80
1935	3,742.60
1936	—
1937	5,162.49
1938	4,795.75
1939	6,494.70
1940	7,088.58
1941	6,467.74
1942	7,617.03
1943	7,568.99

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Since the salaries of the officials amounted to over seven thousand pesos per year (during the forties), it is obvious that there was little money left over for public improvements. This is one of the demoralizing factors in local government and also one of the reasons that the Tepoztecans generally look to the federal government for help. Each president who enters office promises to do something for his pueblo. But he soon learns that there are no funds, not to mention the other difficulties. To make matters worse, many villagers are convinced that the local government officials, especially the president, *síndico*, *regidor*, and secretary, are dishonest and have a large income from illegal dealings. But this does not deny the fact that the official income is much too meager for any significant public works program with local funds.

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It will be noted that the municipio has practically no income from land taxes. Most of the taxes on land goes to the state government. The state government collected over sixty thousand pesos in taxes in the twelve years between 1931 and 1943 for which data are available.[6] During this entire period the only state funds which went back to the village were for the salary of the state tax collector who was paid on a pro rata basis.

The taxes which go to the federal government are considerably smaller than those which go to the state. Federal taxes taken out of Tepoztlán are shown in the following:

Year	*Pesos*
1938	2,529.86
1939	2,455.04
1940	—
1941	3,118.99
1942	3,794.55
1943	3,568.77

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The routine business of the local government consists primarily of issuing permits for various types of activities. The most frequent requests include the following:

Permits for fiestas, religious and secular
Permits for slaughter of animals

[6] These data were obtained from the official state tax records in Cuernavaca.

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Fig. 48. A political rally for state governor.

(2) The practice of buying votes is a well-established custom in the village. Because of this, only candidates with some financial resources can hope to be successful.

665 (3) Political parties as such exist only in name. Instead there are poorly organized and undisciplined political factions whose members are united more by personal ties of friendship or kinship than by common political ideology. During the twenties and thirties the Bolsheviki and Fraternales attempted to introduce some ideological bases for politics but with the disappearance of these organizations the older personalism prevailed. Informants active in one or another of the political factions could not tell us with any precision how many members they had. At best the reply would be, "We are many," or "We have most of the village with us." From time to time the official party of the government in power sends directions to the village to form a local section of the party, be it the Partido Nacional Revolucionario, the Partido de la Revolución Mexicana, or the present-day Partido Revolucionario Institucional. This is generally done but the Tepoztecans think in terms of a particular man rather than the party he represents.

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641 (4) Tepoztecans are as a rule very critical of the motives of the municipal and state government, and only less so of the federal government. Nevertheless, they

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666 become quite enthusiastic participants in the election campaigns. Much of this is
641 stimulated by visiting politicians who are skillful in making promises which Tepoztecans no longer even expect to be fulfilled. As a result they generally favor the opposition candidate as a matter of principle.

665 (5) The Colonia Tepozteco plays a major role in the political life of the village and tends to direct politics toward the right; some, however, proclaim their adherence to the principles of the Mexican Revolution. The Colonia keeps in close touch with the villlage and advises the village leaders on all important undertakings and offers legal and financial aid when the occasion arises.

646 (6) Finally, the accounts show the division within the municipio government itself. It is a rare administration in which the three major officials, the president, the
[631] *síndico*, and the *regidor* work harmoniously. There are also administrative dif-
[624] ficulties between the municipal authorities and the federal and state authorities, particularly between the president and the Commissariat of the Ejidos.

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often express affection most easily toward their dogs and other favorite animals.

The limited expression of affection in Tepoztlán is part of a larger pattern whereby what might be called the positive emotions—love, tenderness, kindness, sympathy, generosity, and joy—are less easily expressed and not as well developed as the negative ones, such as anger, hate, irritability, fear, jealousy, and envy. One of our informants with more insight than most Tepoztecans succinctly described the lack of warmth and positive emotion by saying, "Somos muy secos," that is, "We are dry." This is related to their general world view and their conception of human beings, both of which tend to stimulate negative emotional responses.

There is a readiness to view people as potentially dangerous, and the most characteristic initial reaction to others is suspicion and distrust. Lack of trust is not only present among non-relatives but also exists within families and affects the relations of husbands and wives, parents and children, and brothers and sisters. This is not a neurotic distrust, but one rooted in the hard realities of Tepoztecan social and economic life, in patterns of child-training, and in a long history of conquest, colonial status, and internal and external political and economic exploitation. In Tepoztlán, the motives of everyone are suspected, from the highest public officials of the nation, to the local priest, and even to close relatives. It is assumed that anyone in a position of power will use it to his own advantage at the expense of others. Honest government or leadership is considered an impossibility; altruism is not understood. The frank, direct person, if he exists anywhere in Tepoztlán, is considered naive or the greatest rogue of all, so powerful or shameless as to have no need to conceal his deeds or thoughts. An individual who is obliging without cost to those who seek his aid is understood to have some as yet unrevealed plan for capitalizing on his position.

Friendships, as defined in terms of mutual trust, loyalty, aid, and affection directed toward one individual are few in Tepoztlán, and are avoided rather than sought. Friendship as such is not a Tepoztecan ideal and is not institutionalized in the form of a best friend or in any other way. Cases of lifelong friendships are rare and are almost always limited to the more acculturated families. Friends are viewed by adults as potential enemies, as a source of trouble, and as a waste of time. Traditionally women and girls are not supposed to have any friends whatsoever. While one may have friendly relations with individuals in Tepoztlán, these relations are segmented in that each is limited to one or two purposes. With one individual, there may be a work exchange relationship; with another, a borrowing relationship; and with others, a drinking relationship.

An exception to this is a type of friendship among men and youths known as the *cuate*, which means "twins."[6] These are more in the nature of close alliances made between two or more individuals of the same age group for a more generalized companionship. The *cuate* is depended upon for loyalty and defense in time of trouble, for political support, and for companionship in drinking, in

[6] The *cuate* is not traditional in Tepoztlán, having been introduced by soldiers from outside during the Revolution.